



MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SENIOR SERVICES

# Public Health Preparedness and Response UPDATE

Keeping You Informed

September 2005

## DHSS Active in Hurricane Relief Efforts

The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) expanded its daily operations and services in an effort to provide assistance to persons displaced by Hurricane Katrina. While hurricane response is not something that DHSS typically trains for, preparation for other public health emergencies and terrorist attacks allowed the department to quickly respond to this event.

"The efforts we've put into preparing for a public health emergency or terrorist attack have allowed us to strengthen our response to any emergency situation," said Julie Eckstein, Director of the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services. "DHSS staff are trained in how to respond quickly, efficiently and compassionately to these types of events."

During the hurricane relief efforts, the DHSS Department Situation Room (DSR) operated 24 hours a day, 7 days a week as a command and control center for public health issues. The DSR hotline, 1-800-392-0272, received calls from licensed medical professionals willing to volunteer to assist



DHSS staff working in the DSR - DHSS' command and control center for public health issues.

individuals affected by this disaster. DHSS also worked with numerous organizations across the state offering facilities and supplies for temporary shelters for displaced individuals including ambulance services and long-term care facilities.

Local public health agencies aided numerous displaced individuals and worked with many organizations in their local communities to provide service centers and shelters. These communities formed partnerships with local service providers to offer the best possible care for those affected. To date, Missouri has assisted over 15,000 individuals.

In addition, a mini-city was prepared to accept 2,000 displaced Gulf Coast residents and offer them everything from medical care and clothes to recreation and Internet access. The St. Louis Welcome Center was created as a result of a partnership between the State of Missouri, City of St. Louis and airport authorities, city and federal agencies and many, many local organizations including the United Way, American Red Cross, Salvation Army, Mers Goodwill and many more. DHSS was informed on September 12 that FEMA would be looking for individual housing for evacuees and no longer planned to send evacuees to other states.

"Although it was not used, the set-up of the shelter gave the participating partners invaluable experience and demonstrated the ability and willingness of Missouri citizens to mobilize immediately in response to a disaster situation," added Eckstein.

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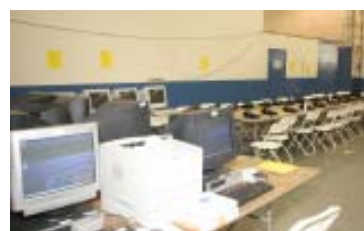
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“The cooperative efforts by many organizations willing to reach out to the individuals affected by this historic disaster were overwhelming. DHSS is proud to be a part of this unmatched group of individuals and organizations. It was moving to see all of the state and local agencies, both public and private, come together to help our fellow Americans,” added Eckstein.

## St. Louis Welcome Center

This first class town-like operation was designed to provide a sense of comfort and compassion to the displaced individuals. For additional photos of the operation, please visit [www.dhss.mo.gov/BT\\_Response/OperationCare.html](http://www.dhss.mo.gov/BT_Response/OperationCare.html) and take a look at the results of this cooperative effort by many organizations willing to reach out to the individuals affected by this historic disaster.



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Our state and local public health mission is to protect the communities' health and the well-being of individuals of all ages by assuring the early detection and the rapid, coordinated response to all public health emergencies, both natural and deliberate.